



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 17, 2014
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

Raised House Bill No. 5080 – AN ACT CONCERNING DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY AND AUTHORIZING BOW AND ARROW HUNTING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY ON SUNDAYS.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill No. 5080 - AN ACT CONCERNING DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY AND AUTHORIZING BOW AND ARROW HUNTING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY ON SUNDAYS. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

DEEP continues to support provisions of proposals that allow for Sunday hunting with a bow and arrow on private lands as a white-tailed deer population management measure, whether statewide or limited to Deer Management Zones identified by the Commissioner as having overabundant deer populations. We have offered the Committee substitute language to accomplish the latter and we support the more limited approach of areas identified by the Commissioner as having overabundant deer populations.

DEEP looks forward to being able to employ this tool to further advance science-based management of our deer populations and wildlife habitats. However, we have serious concerns about the provision that would allow individual private landowners to submit plans to take deer beyond that allowed by standard hunting regulations.

Section 1.

Under existing law, DEEP may authorize municipalities, homeowner associations and nonprofit landholding organizations whose properties are experiencing serious damage from deer to use exceptional measures to reduce localized deer abundance. Such groups must develop and submit a management plan for DEEP's review that details the damage and proposed methods, commonly including the use of sharpshooters, to take deer. This section would expand the array of organizations eligible for such measures to include individual landowners.

Of concern is the need to address an array of public safety and law enforcement issues. Insofar as these measures commonly involve takings at night using rifles, sound suppressors, lights and baiting, in urban and suburban neighborhoods, minimum acreages may need to be formalized. Further, unguided by statutory criteria for implementation, the number of requests may be large as increasingly small property owners seek relief using hired shooters as opposed to relying on existing, highly regulated recreational hunting.

As a practical matter, using exceptional practices on small, private properties will fail to achieve regional or localized deer reduction objectives as adjacent lands will serve as reservoirs for deer that will quickly re-colonize areas subject to control measures. In effect, deer cannot be managed effectively at such fine scales. In addition, fine scale management will inevitably result in conflicts between neighboring landowners. Emblematic of this volatility is the recent, and ongoing, effort to reduce deer abundance on two, one-square mile blocks in Redding as part of a study conducted by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station into means to reduce tick abundance and the incidence of Lyme disease. The resulting differences among property owners and conflict between sportsmen and those using commercial deer culling services have been significant.

Sections 2 and 3.

Sunday hunting is an important and proven measure used in 42 states to achieve wildlife management objectives. Since 2000, DEEP has increased bag limits, lengthened seasons, implemented a January crossbow season and authorized baiting to increase harvest in deer management zones where white-tailed deer are over-abundant. Sunday hunting is one of the last remaining progressive measures designed to meet management objectives. In areas with high densities, deer are causing extensive damage to ecosystems and property and elevating public health and safety risks through tick-borne illnesses and vehicle collisions. The addition of Sundays during the private land archery deer seasons would significantly increase deer harvest by increasing hunter opportunity. DEEP anticipates that harvest rates on Sundays would be similar to those observed on Saturdays, currently the day during which harvest is greatest.

Decades of research have shown bow hunting to be a safe, effective, and efficient tool for managing abundant deer populations. Forty-eight percent of the total 2013 harvest of over 12,500 deer was reported by archers. In some areas, archers are responsible for as much as 90% of the harvest.

Hunting in general is a safe outdoor activity and bow hunting is extremely safe, especially for other outdoor users. Not a single non-hunter has been injured by a bow hunter since passage of the Deer Management Act in 1974. Notwithstanding the excellent safety record of Connecticut bow hunters, DEEP feels strongly that landowners should retain the right to determine who recreates on their properties, whether it is for hunting, hiking, or other outdoor pursuits. This proposed bill includes a provision that no person shall hunt with a bow and arrow on Sunday within forty yards of a blazed hiking trail. Although there is no evidence to support the contention that archery hunting threatens public safety, this provision will allay the perceptions of some outdoor recreationalists.

Finally, the addition of Sunday hunting would provide positive economic benefits and add value to sporting licenses. The 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation reported that hunters alone expended 69 million dollars in pursuit of hunting-related activities in Connecticut.

In general, DEEP believes that all individual private landowners should have the right to determine if bow and arrow hunting is allowed on their property on Sundays. However, DEEP would support changes to this proposal that would limit bow and arrow hunting on private lands on Sundays to only those deer management zones that have been determined to be overpopulated by deer.

In summary, DEEP is confident that the addition of Sunday bow hunting on private lands would play a significant role in meeting deer management objectives and provide significant economic benefits without compromising the safety or interests of other outdoor users.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov).